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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Zenab for Women in Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Eradicating poverty means creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and stability. In the process of wiping out poverty and hunger, Governments and non-governmental organizations in most developing countries are increasingly aware of the strategic role that agriculture plays in local economic development and poverty reduction. This is why more efforts have to be made to induce local farmers to produce more, especially women farmers. Small-scale women farmers grow 80 per cent of the world's food. To maximize their capacity as producers, we need policies that advance the full range of women's rights and ensure their access to land, seeds, water, credit and other inputs. Governments should adopt short- and long-term strategies to fight poverty, and more efforts have to be made to induce local farmers to produce more. We have to support them and build their capacity in order to increase their share in the gross national product. This can be done by scaling up projects that have proven to be successful and allowing farmers to manage more resources of arable land; produce more food to face food security challenges; enhance the formation of local farmers' trade unions and associations; and link them through their representative with Government and decision-making institutions in order to protect them against market fluctuations, keep them aware of climate change and train them to cope with its negative consequences. Green belts should be encouraged to prevent desertification and enhance environment protection measures. Governments and non-governmental organizations should sponsor locally invented intermediate agricultural implements, which are usually of low cost, and introduce their use in small farms for their positive impact on increasing production and water harvest and protecting the environment.

Collaborative efforts to put small farmers, especially women farmers, in many agrarian countries on the right track will eventually bring positive results and reduce food security challenges to a minimum. All efforts have to be made to develop infrastructure in traditional agricultural sectors in many countries to attract investments and enable farmers to benefit. Digging water wells in agricultural regions where underground water is in abundance may solve the problem of irrigation water and enable many to produce more in times of little rain.

In rural Sudan, Zenab for Women in Development has designed a programme to support local women farmers by organizing them to form their own union. Women Farmers Unite (WFU) aims to empower women farmers in the rural Al-Qadarif area of the Sudan, organizing the women from surrounding communities. The purpose of WFU is to increase the production of crops by consolidating resources, knowledge and organizational strength with the goal of increasing the productivity of small subsistence farm plots managed by women, thereby simultaneously increasing food production and decreasing malnutrition among women and children. In 2009, it began a project to introduce intermediate technology to farmers, providing them with agricultural implements and training. While traditional Sudanese agriculture is more prevalent, introducing intermediate technology would allow improvements and increased efficiency without full mechanization. Through a series of gradual steps, WFU can safely transform traditional agriculture methods into modern agriculture. By working closely with local manufacturers and artisans, farmers have greater control over their livelihood. Zenab for Women in Development managed to distribute agricultural inputs and help almost 3,000 women farmers; as a result, the farmers have witnessed a high

increase in food production since 2006, and their living conditions and annual income have significantly improved. They have gained more knowledge and skills, and we expect this to continue as families become more stable and have a permanent source of income. The project has been implemented with the help of other partners, such as Madre.

Full support should be provided for projects that empower women, such as those aimed at reducing their illiteracy rate, facilitating girls' access to education, providing support to working women in securing a permanent source of income and raising women's awareness of issues of public health, maternity and basic human rights.

Although some progress has been made in women's participation in politics, access to health services and women assuming public office, the majority of women in developing countries still strive to gain their basic rights and are still victims of social traditions and beliefs. Gender-sensitive Governmental institutions will allow women to have equal access to and control over resources. We call for the funding of local plans and policies that undertake gender issues and work for the advancement of women, especially rural women, encourage methods to increase livelihood options for the poor, especially poor women, incorporate women in the development process, facilitate their access to financial services and conduct activities to develop their talents and access to skills in business and management.

On the other hand, there needs to be a focus on water, sanitation and universal access to reproductive health, as it is integral to reducing maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, curbing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, empowering women and girls and building a more sustainable world for all women, men and young people.

We have to mobilize domestic resources in each country, and the international community should support the role of civil society, promoting fairer trade relations and debt cancellation, holding corporations and the private sector to account for socially responsible investment, and focusing on donor countries' efforts to put in place trade rules, which allow genuine market access for poor countries, and end trade-distorting agricultural subsidies. More efforts have to be made by the international community to articulate and effect financial policy to facilitate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.